Reed Act/Gates Foundation Broadband Program
Library of Michigan
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Background:

In an innovative, first of its kind partnership among State of Michigan agencies, a total of $4 million in federal Reed Act funds was appropriated to the Library of Michigan. These funds are excess Federal Unemployment Insurance Trust Act (FUTA) reserve proceeds released to the states, generally during economic recessions, to help meet the needs of unemployed workers. The states can utilize the funding for program administration and expanded benefits. The Reed Act funds are being used to provide grants and other support to public libraries across the state of Michigan. These libraries will use the granted funds to assist patrons seeking employment resources via the Internet.

The Library of Michigan has been able to use some of the Reed Act funding to purchase "LearnATest" which is an online database offered statewide via the Michigan eLibrary (MeL.org) that includes test preparation materials and interactive practice for tests such as the ACT, ASVAB, SAT, & various Civil Service exams. In addition, Michigan's Library Cooperatives have been receiving Reed Act funding for the development and delivery of training programs and resources to assist library staff in serving the unemployed.

The Reed Act funds provide a unique opportunity to leverage other funding resources to maximize opportunities for libraries to upgrade technology resources to broadband capacities. The combination of Reed Act funds along with other federal, foundation and local funds will provide a bridge to a sustainable technology program that will ensure that ongoing library services will be made available to local communities. The Library of Michigan has received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation targeted for broadband upgrades for public libraries, which, together with the Reed Act funds and the federal E-rate program for sustainability, will provide a well-rounded solution for serving the unemployed via Michigan's public libraries.

What is the Reed Act/Gates Foundation Broadband Program?

The Library of Michigan is offering a grant program using Reed Act and Gates Foundation funds that will enable public libraries to enhance the connectivity of their public access computers to provide quick access to Internet resources for the unemployed. Libraries will apply for funding for broadband upgrades and for the non-discounted portion of their annual telecommunications and/or Internet service costs. Priority will be given to libraries in areas of high unemployment. Libraries will apply for federal E-rate discounts for ongoing sustainability of their broadband services or will provide a description of their plans to sustain services through other mechanisms.

Expected Results:

Michigan residents who seek unemployment resources through public libraries will be able to use public access computers in order to access online unemployment resources, job seeking tools, and skill building resources made available to them. They will be able to:

- File unemployment claims online via public access computers
- Study for employment tests and take sample tests
- Participate in online tutorials and web-based training courses
- Identify potential employers online
- Identify and understand the elements of an effective resume
- Submit electronic applications
- Take online aptitude tests, such as the Michigan Occupational Information System (MOIS)

These funds will also enable training and resources to be provided to Michigan's public library staff via the library cooperatives and the Michigan eLibrary (MeL) so staff may:

- Help individuals access unemployment resources
- Help individuals access online resources to perform job searches and improve job application skills, and
- Promote the public library as a job-finding and skill-building resource for the unemployed.

Further Activities:

In addition to administering the Reed Act and Gates Foundation funds for broadband upgrades, the Library of Michigan will provide:

- Statewide E-rate program training for libraries and will provide support to Library Cooperative Directors or their designees with regional program questions in an effort to support local plans for sustainability.
- Online help support services to provide assistance in upgrading to broadband services.
- Assistance with design requirements for end-to-end services from Internet service providers to minimize need for additional maintenance contracts, equipment replacement costs, etc. for Internet services.
- Coordination with Department of Information Technology to utilize financial impact of aggregated demand through the use of a statewide bid(s), where possible, for telecommunications and Internet services.
- Resource information with regard to LAN technical support.
- A separate resource page on the Michigan eLibrary (MeL) specially designed to serve the unemployed.

- Training via the Michigan Library Consortium and Michigan's library cooperatives on the use of MeL resources specifically to serve the unemployed.